

January 28, 2009

Dear Legislators,

On behalf of the School Health Advisory Committee for Billings Public Schools (SD-2) I urge you to support SB 88 the *Revise and Clarify School Speed Zone Law*.

The Billings School Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) was formed in fall 2006 to help the School District 2 implement the USDA-mandated school wellness policy. USDA guidelines stipulate that each school district's wellness policy needs to include recommendations for improving local school food and activity practices and programs for students, faculty and staff.

Research by the Centers for Disease Control, Safe Routes to School and other experts has shown that walking or biking to school helps children meet their daily physical activity requirements. If enough children go to and from school under their own power, it also reduces air pollution and traffic congestion in around the school improving environmental health and safety.

Accordingly, SHAC's top recommendation for increasing physical activity amongst students focused on helping students to safely travel between home and school via non-motorized transportation using the two-pronged approach described below:

1. Students should be encouraged to walk, roller blade or bike to school in order to help them meet their daily physical activity requirements.
2. The administrative staff at each school should work with parents, students and community members who live or work in close proximity to schools to develop safe walking and biking routes so more students and their parents will feel comfortable relying on non-motorized transportation.

By clearly, defining the school speed zone area SB 88 will give administrators and police the tools necessary to create and enforce a safer environment for all individuals, particularly students traveling to and from school. This may in turn convince more parents to have their children walk and/ or bike to school.

Please support SB 88 for the health and safety of students and the community.

Sincerely,

Virginia L Mermel, PhD,CNS,CLC
Chair, School Health Advisory Committee
Billings Public Schools
406-661-2642
3611 Flagstone Dr.
Billings MT, 59102

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee

Thank you for your service to our communities. School District 2 Board of Trustees is writing in support of SB 88 to revise and clarify school speed zone law.

In our role as trustees, representing the interests of families whose children enjoy the health, educational, and environmental benefits of walking or biking to school, we would like to bring to your attention some startling statistics.

Fatal injury occurs in only 5% of the cases when a pedestrian is hit at 20 mi/hr. A pedestrian has a 45% fatality rate when speeds are increased from 20 mi/hr to 25mi/hr, and a pedestrian has an 85% chance of death when hit at speeds of 40mi/hr. (Ashton and Mackay 1979).

In Montana, approximately 30% of all pedestrians and over 50% of all bicyclists injured or killed are under the age of 15. (*See Montana's Invisible Traffic Victims: A Preliminary Report on Pedestrian and Bicyclist Injuries in the Treasure State.*)

This correlates into children of school age walking to and from their neighborhood school. Of course, it also correlates with the age of the pedestrian or bicyclist and causation (e.g. younger child running into the road.) However, we believe the younger the child, the greater the responsibility to employ measures that remove probability.

Also, the impact may have a relationship to socioeconomics in that the greater number of children that walk to school in poverty stricken areas makes these populations particularly vulnerable.

Therefore, in an attempt to make our streets and neighborhoods as safe as possible for these vulnerable travelers, we, the school District 2 Board of Trustees, urge your support of SB 88.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathy Aragon,
Legislative Liaison
SD2 Board of Trustees

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee

Highland Elementary PTSA (Parent Teacher Student Association) is writing to support of SB 88 to revise and clarify school speed zone law. The clarification of a school zone is needed in order to implement safety related laws.

As I am sure you are aware, speeding motorized traffic presents a great risk to our most vulnerable travelers. Fatal injury occurs in only 5% of the cases when a pedestrian is hit at 20 mi/hr, but a pedestrian has an 85% chance of death when hit at speeds of 40mi/hr as (Ashton and Mackay 1979). Therefore, a serious effort to implement reduced speed limits in our school zones is vital.

Another recent statistic from Billings alone last year, was that bicycle crashes (only those that were recorded) increased by 45% (Department of Transportation, State Highway Traffic Safety). While the greater number of cyclist injuries may be indicative of the greater number of bicyclists on the road due to economic, health and transportation benefits; we believe that we all have an obligation to protect these most vulnerable travelers.

Therefore in an attempt to make our schools as safe as possible for all, we urge your support of SB 88.

Sincerely,

Highland Elementary School PTSA
Jane Leuthold, President
Josi Wilgus, Health and Safety Committee Chair